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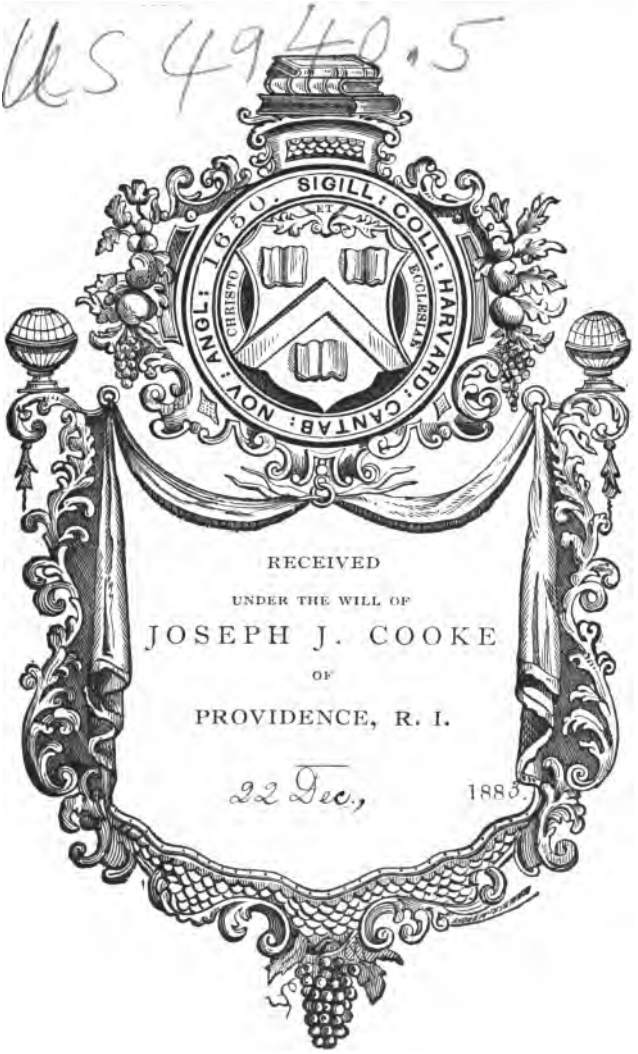

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BREVET MAJ. GEN. N. TOWSON

PAY MASTER GENERAL U.S. ARMY.

A

SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF

GENERAL NATHAN TOWSON,

UNITED STATES' ARMY.

BALTIMORE:
PUBLISHED BY N. HICKMAN.
Lucas & Deaver, Printers.
1842.

~~7262.30~~
U.S.4940,5

1883, Dec. 22.
Cooke bequest.

PREFACE.

In presenting to the public a sketch of the life of one, so intimately connected with our country's honor, we can indulge but a faint hope, that, in these few pages, justice has been done to the subject of this biography.

Raised beneath the roof of a Maryland Farmer, he has throughout life given evidences of those kind sensibilities, which adorn a military commander. As a brave and skillful officer, and polite gentleman, the American army has few equals and no superior. A perusal of the following pages cannot fail to produce a conviction that "*Towson's Light House*" decided the fate of many a hard fought battle; and though fortune has, for a while deprived him of his just reward, yet time will do him justice; and the name of *Towson* will go down to posterity, as one of the unpretending great men of our country.

PUBLISHER.

SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF

GENERAL NATHAN TOWSON.

From the Portico of 1817.

THERE cannot be found in the American army, a more interesting subject for a biographical memoir, than the one which now engages our attention. The early life and prospects of Lieut. Colonel Towson, were such as to afford but a very faint indication of the splendor of his subsequent career; a splendor which, considering the sphere of action, has seldom been equalled, and perhaps never eclipsed. The parents of Col. Towson were both natives of Baltimore county in the State of Maryland, where they lived and died, respected and esteemed by their neighbors. The subject of this memoir was the *youngest of twelve children*; and was born on the 22d of January, 1784, at a little village called *Towsonton*, about seven miles from the city of Baltimore. He received the rudiments of education, at a little school in the country; and continued with his parents, engaged in the various occupations of farming, until the age of 16. During this period, he was distinguished among his young associates, for an urbanity of disposition, and a sprightliness of humor, that made his company always welcome. He was fond of reading, and never lost an opportunity of profiting by the books that fell in his way. He was particularly delighted with *poetry;* and some little pieces have been shown to us, as the production of his boyish days, which furnish no equivocal proofs of genius. In 1801, he was sent to Kentucky, for the purpose of residing upon and cultivating a farm, to which his father had a claim; but finding the property disputed, he soon left that State and went to Natchez; where he remained for three years: here it was that his military spirit began to develope itself. Louisiana had just then been purchased by our government, of France; and suspicions were entertained, that some opposition would be made to our taking possession of the territory. This led to the formation of *volunteer* companies; and young Towson enrolled him-

self in a company of artillery, who volunteered to accompany Governor Claiborne to New Orleans, with the militia of the Mississippi territory.

Upon their arrival at *Fort Adams*, on the Mississippi, much dissatisfaction was created among the volunteers, by the infamous conduct of the *contractor*, who issued to them provisions, which had been condemned and refused by the regular troops as unsound and *offensive*. The privates of several companies entered into a resolution to place Towson at their head, and to return home, the next morning, in a body: He was not present at the consultation, but the result was soon communicated to him, together with the offer of the command of the mal-contents. His conduct, on this occasion was highly honorable and praise-worthy. Instead of listening to the youthful whisperings of ambition, and rendering himself at once conspicuous, by accepting the proffered command, he at first remonstrated with his fellow-soldiers, upon their improper conduct; and next threatened, unless they immediately consented to abandon their mutinous design, he would expose them to the Governor, and take such steps as would effectually thwart their schemes, and punish the projector—promising them at the same time, that if they would quietly return to their duty, nothing should be said of their intention, and he would himself wait upon the Governor, and endeavor to have their cause of grievance removed. This was consented to, and upon the promised representation of Towson, the abuse was corrected. Upon the return of the militia, Towson was appointed first Lieutenant of the company; and soon after to the command of the "*Natchez Volunteer Artillery.*"

In the autumn of 1805, Towson returned to Baltimore County, where he arrived only a few weeks before the death of his father. Here he remained, residing with his mother, until her decease; an event which took place about two years after that of his father. When the military spirit of the country began to be roused by what has been emphatically called the *affair of the Chesapeake*, he was appointed Adjutant of the 7th Regiment of Maryland Militia. In this station he labored with such skill and assiduity, that he soon brought that regiment to a high state of discipline; and acquired such a reputation for military talents, that at the subsequent meeting of the Legislature, when it was thought necessary to revise the Militia Laws, the subject was referred to him by the representatives of the county, for his advice. From this time, until the year 1812, Mr. Towson seems to have devoted himself to the business of farming. But his active and vigorous mind could not confine itself to the pursuits of husbandry; all his leisure time was employed in the study of mathematical science, in which he made such profici-

ency, as to render himself master of several mechanical arts. Nor did he forget to indulge his fondness for the higher branches of study, particularly History and Poetry. He was enthusiastic in his admiration of *Burns*, and about this time, wrote several pieces for his friends, in imitation of that "sweet child of nature!" If Mr. Towson's opportunities for improvement, at this time, had been equal to his thirst for knowledge, and to the expansive powers of his intellect, there are few men in our country, perhaps, who would have stood on a higher point of eminence.

On the 15th March, 1812, Mr. Towson received the appointment of Captain of Artillery; and on the first of May following was ordered on the recruiting service. In this he was so diligent and successful, that by the time the declaration of War was promulgated, he had recruited as fine a company as ever entered the field. With this company, he was soon after ordered to join the 2d Regiment of Artillery, then at Philadelphia, under the immediate command of Lieut. Colonel (since Major General) Scott: and, accordingly on the 3d of August, he commenced his march, under the command of Colonel Mitchell, then a Major of the same regiment. Soon after his arrival at Philadelphia, Lieut. Colonel Scott obtained an order to join the army under General Dearborn, at Greenbush, whither he repaired with Towson's and Barker's companies. Having reasons to expect that the army under General Smyth would soon be actively employed, Col. Scott had scarcely reached Greenbush, before he solicited orders to be sent with his artillery to Buffalo; and halting but three days at Albany, for the purpose of fitting out a train of field pieces, he soon reached that post. Thence he was immediately ordered to Black Rock, to protect the vessels that were then fitting out for the Lake service under the command of Lieut. Elliot of the Navy. On the morning after the arrival of Scott with his Artillery, at Black Rock, two of the enemy's vessels came down the Lake and anchored under the guns of Fort Erie. Lieut. Elliott immediately formed a plan to capture them, and communicating it to General Smyth and Lieutenant Colonel Scott, asked for the co-operation and assistance of the army. The two companies under Scott *volunteered* for this service, to a man: but as they were not all required, the number was filled by *draft*. The Artillery furnished thirty men and two officers; and as the rank of the two Captains, Towson and Barker, had not been settled, they cast lots for the command, and fortune decided in favor of Towson. The expedition was fitted out in two boats; the one under the command of Lieut. Elliott, who had with him Lieut. Roach of the Artillery, and Lieut. Presstman, a young gentleman of Baltimore, to command the Infantry; the other boat under the command of Sailing Master Watts had 20 Sailors and 28 Artillerists under Towson. The plan was, to ascend the Lake with muffled oars, drop down with

the current, make a simultaneous attack upon the two brigs which lay under cover of the guns of the Fort, and carry them by boarding. In ascending the Lake, the boat which carried Towson got ahead, and lost sight of the other; and was hailed and fired at by the *Detroit*, which lay highest up the Lake. Sailing Master Watts supposing that his pilot had not kept near enough to the shore, to make a successful attack upon the *Caledonia*, ordered him to pass that vessel: but Towson, who differed with him in opinion, assumed command of the boat, and peremptorily ordered the Pilot to lay her along side of that vessel. This order was executed without opposition, and in a few seconds. In attempting to fasten the *grapplings*, all missed their aim but one; and the boat necessarily fell astern, exposed to a severe and destructive fire from the cabin windows and deck of the brig. The boat, however, was hauled alongside, and in less than two minutes, the brig was boarded and carried. The attention of the *Detroit* was so closely engaged by this enterprise, that the approach of Lieut. Elliot in the other boat was not observed; so that he was enabled to carry that vessel without loss, and with but little difficulty. Both brigs were immediately got under way, and both unfortunately grounded in the Niagara river, within point-blank-shot of the Canada shore. Advantage was taken of this disaster by the enemy; who, as soon as day dawned, brought up a few field pieces, and opened a battery on the brigs. The Sailing Master and Pilot left the vessel, with the prisoners, about sunrise. Capt. Towson remained on board, took out the greater part of the cargo, (consisting of furs,) and succeeded in getting the brig afloat, about sunset; but not being versed in navigation, and all the sailors except two having deserted in landing the cargo, he ran aground a second time, near Squaw Island. In the night, Colonel Schuyler, who had just taken the command at Black Rock, received intelligence that General Brock had crossed the Niagara below, with a formidable force, and was marching to attack him. Lieut. Elliott sent an officer with this information to Captain Towson, with combustibles, and an order to set fire to the brig. Towson would not permit this order to be executed, but believing his presence with his company necessary, in the event of an attack on shore, he left a faithful non-commissioned officer and two men on board; with orders to fire and abandon her if it should appear that the enemy were likely to succeed in forcing the troops to retire to the main body at Flint Hill. This did not happen: General Brock had not crossed the Niagara, as reported: and thus, by the judicious management of Captain Towson, was the *Caledonia* reserved to make one of the gallant Perry's victorious fleet.

The circumstances attending the capture of these brigs, so far as the volunteers of the army had a hand in them, have certainly never received the notice, which they merited, of our government. Lieut.

Colonel Scott, to whom Captain Towson naturally looked, for a report of his participation in the affair, was made prisoner at Queenstown, immediately after, and before he had an opportunity of mentioning the gallant achievement of the Captain. The only report of the capture of the brigs, therefore, was made by the naval commander; to whom the credit is due of originating the scheme. Lieut. Elliott received the thanks of Congress, while no notice was taken of Captain Towson; although the latter boarded and carried the *Caledonia*, and afterwards by his persevering intrepidity *saved her*, under circumstances of difficulty and danger, not less than those that caused the destruction of the other brig. On the return of Lieut. Colonel Scott from captivity, some months afterwards, we are told, he obtained a promise from Mr. Armstrong, then Secretary of War, to *brevet* Captain Towson for his highly distinguished part in that affair; but, for reasons with which we are unacquainted, that promise was never fulfilled.

Owing to the exertions of Colonel Scott, the Artillery were the only troops of General Smyth's command, engaged in the battle of Queenstown. They arrived at Lewistown, immediately after the battle commenced. Only one boat had been provided for the transportation of the Artillery, and that could carry but one piece at a time. This was occupied by Captain Gibson, of the Light Artillery, who had been stationed at Niagara. He succeeded in getting over but one of his guns and a *Caisson*. The remainder of the Artillery was posted opposite the enemy's batteries, and throughout the whole day, kept up a heavy cannonade. About 8 o'clock in the morning, Col. Scott crossed over to Queenstown, and took the command; leaving Capt. Towson in command of the Artillery.

After the action Captain Towson reported to General Van Rensellaer, for orders. The General, whose militia had already refused to cross over to the assistance of their brethren, had but little confidence that they would be able or willing to defend their own position, and told Captain Towson, that he expected to be obliged to retreat. Towson, however, assured him, that with the artillery under his command, and such of the militia as would be willing to remain, he had no doubt of being able to defend his camp, provided that he might be permitted to dispose of the force as he thought proper. This proposition was readily acceeded to by the General, with the hope of saving a large quantity of public property, which must have fallen into the hands of the enemy, in the event of a retreat. An *armistice* of three days, was immediately afterwards proposed by the enemy, and agreed to. In the mean time General Towson went on with his arrangements for defence. General Van Rensellaer having submitted the entire control to him, he concentrated the forces of the encampment; assigned to the different regiments their positions; and gave

notice to the *militia* that in the event of an attack, if they attempted to quit their position, the Artillery posted on their flanks, had peremtory orders to turn their fire upon them.

Nothing important occurred after the battle of Queenstown. Gen. Smyth returned to Buffalo; and several fruitless attempts were made to cross the Niagara. When the army went into winter quarters, Towson had his choice, either to remain at Black Rock, or to join the artillery at Williamsville, under the command of Colonel Moses Porter. He preferred the former; and after getting his men into comfortable quarters, employed the time in building and repairing batteries, and in the *drill* exercise.

Black Rock was considered as the *Alarm Post*, for the American army; and Captain Towson had received orders from Colonel Porter, who succeeded General Smyth in the command, to fire three guns in quick succession, in the event of any indication of an attack. On the night of the 16th of March, 1813, some militia stationed at Buffalo, conceived the project of crossing on the ice, and attacking Fort Erie: they had proceeded about half-way across the Lake, when probably their *hearts* failed them; and suddenly abandoning the enterprise, they *discharged their arms*, and returned. This firing caused Towson to fire his *alarm* guns; and the enemy's batteries were, in consequence immediately opened upon him. This was about 12 o'clock at night and a very spirited cannonade ensued and was kept up for some time. In the morning Towson received an order from the commanding officer, to *cease* firing; at which his feelings were so much hurt, that he immediately repaired to Head-Quarters, and offered the resignation of his commission: for the Captain believed, that his own and his country's *honor* would be thus left at the mercy of the enemy, who might believe that *they had silenced his guns*, and report the issue as a *victory*. Fortunately for the service, however, Colonel Porter, instead of accepting the proffered resignation, ordered Towson to return to his post; and visiting it himself immediately afterwards, gratified the Captain by another order, to return the enemy's fire.

This was, perhaps, one of the best practical lessons in gunnery, which our Artillerists received, during the war. Towson lost three men *by accident*. The loss of the enemy was never ascertained; but it may be supposed to have been considerable, from the following extract of a letter from Colonel Bishop, who commanded at Fort Erie, to General Vincent, which was found among the papers of the latter after the capture of Fort George: "The Americans [says he] have learned the art of using our Shrapnell Shells; *one of their shells*, fired on the 17th, killed and wounded *eight men*."

At the opening of the campaign of 1813, Towson was attached to the Brigade of General Winder, and participated with it in

the capture of Fort George. While this army lay at *Forty Mile Creek*, a few days previous to the battle of *Stoney Creek*, Captain Towson received information, that a quantity of ammunition and military stores had been left by the enemy on his retreat, about four miles from the camp. He communicated this to the General, and solicited permission to go in quest of them. The enemy in the mean time, having learned that the Americans had discovered the stores, despatched the famous Chief *Norton* with two hundred Indians, to intercept the party that might be sent to remove them. Capt. Towson, however succeeded in his hazardous enterprise, and sent the stores safely into camp before the arrival of Norton's party; but remained himself with *six* of his men, for the purpose of making further search. In the mean time the Indians arrived; but Towson was too wary a soldier to be taken by surprise: they were discovered, before they could accomplish their object of getting between his party and the American camp. He dispatched an express to General Winder, with intelligence of his situation, saying, he would endeavor to draw the Indians towards the camp, and *amuse* them, if the General should think proper to order a party to his assistance. Such an order was forthwith given to the Riflemen; and had it been promptly executed, there is little doubt but that a large part of the Indians might have been killed or captured; for having no idea that information of their approach could have been communicated to the American camp, they pursued Towson and his little party for a considerable distance. One of his men was wounded in this running fight, and afterwards *tomahawked* and *scalped:* the *first act* of brutality which his Britanic Majesty's allies had had an opportunity of committing.

At the battle of *Stoney Creek*, Captain Towson was the senior officer of Artillery. He was stationed about the centre of the American camp, in a lane, through which the enemy advanced to the attack. The position was a commanding one, and the fire of his artillery, while it lasted, was uncommonly destructive; but from some unfortunate mistake, occasioned by the darkness of the night, he was ordered to cease firing. The order was immediately obeyed; and while Towson was taking advantage of this cessation, to prepare his rear for movement if it should be thought necessary, the enemy charged his battery. The night was so dark that they approached within a few yards before they were discovered. His men were not provided with small arms, and as the 23d Infantry, which had been posted in the rear for their support, had abandoned their position at the commencement of the action, his guns of course fell into the hands of the enemy: several of his men were bayonetted, and seventeen of them made prisoners. Upon being informed of this event, Captain Towson with Captain Steele of the infantry, proceeded to-

wards the enemy for the purpose of reconoitering, and were both made prisoners; but Towson, ever on the alert, seized a favorable opportunity and made his escape, protected by the darkness from the numerous shots that where fired at him by the enemy. As soon as day-light appeared, he regained possession of two of his guns, which had been spiked and left upon the field; and collecting a few stragglers of the company, succeeded in rendering them again serviceable. By firing a few rounds into the woods where some *red coats* were still visible, the enemy were induced to retire altogether, and leave the Americans masters of the field.

By a *council of war*, to which Captain Towson, though senior officer of Artillery, was not invited, it was decided that the army should return to *Forty Mile Creek;* a measure against which he strongly remonstrated. In the *official* report of the action at that place, it was stated that the Artillery under Captains *Archer*, Towson and *Leonard*, *behaved well.* We have been assured, from unquestionable authority, that the first of these officers was at the time, on the lake shore, *two miles from the field of action;* and that the last did not fire a gun: so that whatever credit was due to the *Artillery*, on that occasion should have been given exclusively to the Company under the immediate command of Captain Towson.

After the return of the army to *Forty Mile Creek*, the enemy's fleet made its appearance on the morning of the 8th of June, from which a schooner was despatched, for the purpose of destroying our boats, which lay at the mouth of the creek with the baggage of the army, about to be sent to Fort George. With a view to prevent the accomplishment of this object, Captains Towson and Archer were ordered, with four field pieces, to the shore; with which they played their parts so well, that the schooner was soon compelled to seek safety by a return to the fleet. The praise of this little affair was lost to Captain Towson by the *official report:* for Major General Lewis, who was then in command of that part of the army, attributed the exploit to Captain *Totten*, of the Engineers, who had nothing to do with the repulse of the schooner, and who was *brevetted* on that report.

While the army lay at Fort George, under the command of Gen. Boyd, the enemy were in possession of all the strong positions in its vicinity; and skirmishes took place, almost every day, between the *pickets* and foraging parties, so that the *picket* duty became one of constant activity as well as of considerable hazard. In this situation, many of the Infantry Captains to whom the duty especially belonged, being sick or absent, and the remainder of the army being in a state of perfect inactivity, Towson volunteered his services, and was the only Artillery officer who did so. The *piquets* were attacked

almost every night, and in one of these skirmishes, he received a wound in his hand.

Among the troops left at Fort George, when the army moved down the St. Lawrence, was the second Artillery to which Captain Towson belonged. They were afterwards marched to Sackett's Harbor where Towson remained until April, 1814.

He was then ordered to the Niagara frontier, and commenced his march under the command of Colonel Mitchell. When they reached Batavia, subsequent arrangements were made that separated these officers. Towson continued the march to Buffalo, while Colonel Mitchell was ordered to make a retrograde movement with four companies, for the protection of the public property at Oswego. Having mentioned the name of this gallant officer, our readers, we hope, will pardon us for detaining them a few moments, while we follow him to Oswego. All the naval ordnance and equipments for Chauncey's fleet, together with the provisions for the army, and an immense quantity of other public and private property, were deposited at the Falls of Oswego river. The British, after several unsuccessful attempts to destroy our shipping, and naval materials elsewhere, at length formed the design of getting possession of those at Oswego; and for this purpose, on the 5th of May, Sir James Yeo proceeded with his whole fleet, and a force of two thousand men under General Drummond, to storm the town. Col. Mitchell, with little more than *three hundred* inexperienced soldiers defended the place for two days, against this enormous superiority of force, and at length made good his retreat; leaving the plains of Oswego strewed with the bodies of his enemies. Thus, by the heroic valor and consummate skill of this truly *Spartan band*, was the object of the British general defeated, and the public property saved; the loss of which would in all probability have led to the fall of Sackett's Harbor, the capture of our fleet, and perhaps the destruction of the whole Ontario Frontier. We have often heard this gallant officer express his regret at the necessity that separated him from Captain Towson; and his constant belief that with the additional aid of his Light Artillery, he would have been able to have maintained his position at Oswego.

To return to our subject. While the army lay at Buffalo, under the command of Brigadier General Scott, Captain Towson, (who had been attached to his Brigade at the particular request of Gen. Scott,) employed every moment of his time in drilling his company. The greater part of his men had been but newly transferred to him, and were entirely destitute of discipline. The orders of the commanding general will show how well he succeeded in forming them to the most exact and perfect discipline. So great was the confidence of General Scott, in the judgment of Towson, that he left it to himself, to choose his position in the brigade; and we have been told that

neither that General, nor any other senior officer, ever found it necessary to give *detailed* instructions to Captain Towson, on any occasion. The slightest intimation of what was to be done, was always sufficient. After the surrender of Fort Erie, General Scott was ordered to advance upon Chippewa; and in the battle of the 5th, which followed, Towson chose his position on the right of the line, and directly opposite to the enemy's Artillery. The *number* of pieces was the same on both sides: but those of the enemy were 24 *pounders;* and those of the Americans only 6. At the commencement of the action, the fire from the enemy was well kept up and very destructive; but before it was half over, their battery was silenced, their ammunition wagon blown up, and it was with great difficulty their guns were saved by the dragoons—their artillery horses having been all killed. A few days before this battle Captain Towson had been afflicted with an inflammation in his eyes; and being enveloped in the smoke of his own battery, he could not observe the changing position of the enemy, advancing to the charge, and nearly in contact with our line. General Scott galloped up to him, and pointed out the new position which they had gained: Towson immediately opened an oblique fire of *cannister*, which enfiladed the enemy from left to right, and thus very materially contributed to their entire defeat, which followed in a few moments, and under that fire. Capt. Towson's company was the only Artillery engaged in this affair, until after the enemy's retreat.

At the battle of *Bridgewater*, Towson's company suffered severely. Both his Lieutenants, (Campbell and Scmuck) were wounded; and of *thirty-six men* who served at his guns, *twenty-seven* were killed and wounded. During the whole action, he was exposed to the severest fire of the enemy; whose advantageous position and superiority of guns, (until the arrival of our reinforcement) precluded all hope of silencing them. One of their guns had been ordered into the Queenstown road, to check the advance of our column; but it was soon silenced by Lieutenant Campbell, who was sent by Towson, with one gun, for that purpose, and was afterwards brought off by our artillery.

When the army retired to Fort Erie, Captain Towson's company, now reduced to 40 men, was stationed on the left flank of the encampment. On the morning of the 15th of August, in conjunction with Major Wood, and 250 infantry, they repulsed the right column of the enemy, consisting of 1500 men, in several attempts to assault. Such was the vivacity of the fire from Towson's battery, on this occasion, that the enemy gave to it, the name of "light-house;" and it was afterwards familiarly called, by the American troops, *Towson's light-house.*

We have thus endeavored to give a brief sketch of the military services of Lieutenant Colonel Towson; in which we have done no more than simply to state the various actions, in which he bore a part. Were we to enumerate all the instances of personal courage, skill, judgement and prudence, which were eminently conspicuous in his conduct during the war; and the truth of which would be confirmed by all his companions in arms, superior and inferior in rank; we should be accused of quitting the plain path of biography, for that of eulogy. The services of such a man require no hyperbolick aid, to mark their pre-eminence. Had he been *brevetted*, as some others have been, for each particular affair, in which his conduct received the distinguished approbation of those who best knew how to estimate its importance, he would now have been a *Captain* of a *Regiment*, with the brevet rank of a *Brigadier General*. In private life Lieutenant Colonel Towson has always been as remarkable for mildness of manners, and amiability of temper, as he has been distinguished for skill and gallantry in the face of the foe. He is retained in the Military Peace Establishment of the United States, as a *Captain* of Light Artillery, with the *brevet* rank of *Lieutenant Colonel*.

At the close of the war, his fellow-citizens of Baltimore city and county, desirous of evincing their sense of his services proposed to bestow upon him the most lucrative office in their gift, (the Sheriffalty) in which, we believe, their suffrages would have been unanimous; but he had either become so enamored of a military life, or the execution of the duties of this unthankful office, was so repugnant to his feelings, that he could not be prevailed upon to accede to the proposition.

It is evident the writer of General Towson's biography, found his materials would be too abundant for the limits of the Portico, if he treated the *military* incidents of his life with the particularity of a professed biographer; and he passes over, or slightly notices, some of the most important events, as will be seen by the following extracts from official reports and other unquestionable sources.

In General Brown's official report of the battle of Chippewa, the Artillery is thus noticed. "The corps of Artillery under Major Hindman, were not generally in action; this was not their fault. Captain Towson's company was the only one that had a full opportunity of distinguishing itself, and it is believed, that no company ever embraced an opportunity with more zeal or more success." The following is an extract from the general order issued the day after the battle of Chippewa.

"Major General Brown has the gratification to say, that the soldiers of the second division, west of the Niagara, merit greater applause, than he is able to bestow in general orders; they merit the highest approbation of their country. The conduct of Brigadier General Scott's Brigade, which had the opportunity to engage the whole force of the enemy, the greater part, it is believed, of all in the peninsula, removes on the day of this battle, the reflection on our country, that its reputation in arms is yet to be established. His brigade consists of battalions of the 9th, the 11th and the 25th, and a detachment of the 22d. Towson's company of Artillery which was attached to it, gallantly commenced, and with it sustained the action."

General Wilkinson, an old soldier and an able writer, in criticising this well fought battle, says:

"Captain Towson, who was attached to the first brigade, with three pieces, and was encamped at K, with the decision which marks the character of this gallant officer, immediately crossed the bridge, and taking a station near the river, opened his battery on the enemy before Scott's line was formed. General Scott advanced with great intrepidity, although out-flanked, after his intervals had been extended to four-fold distance, and the two lines, when approximated within short musket shot, resorted to the effect of their fire, in which the American soldier, from the habits of early life will always excel; a warm, close and bloody conflict of small arms and field artillery ensued, in which it was the good fortune of the gallant Towson, to silence the enemy's chief battery; at this critical juncture, General Rial took the resolution, which should have directed his conduct in the onset; he determined to decide the contest with the bayonet, and commenced his charge, when Towson, relieved from the pressure of the opposed battery, found himself at leisure to turn his guns, and scour the adverse line with showers of canister. This oblique attack of the Artillery and the perpendicular fire of the American line was insupportable; and valorous troops yielded the palm and retreated precipitately, leaving their killed and wounded on the field, but carrying off their Artillery; comparing small with great things, here, as at Minden, the fate of the day was settled by the Artillery; and the American Towson may deservedly be ranked, with the British Phillips, Drummond and Foy."

General Towson's biographer says, "had he been brevetted as some others have been, for each particular affair, in which his conduct received the distinguished approbation of those who best know how to estimate its importance, he would now have been a *Captain* of a *Regiment* with the brevet rank of a *Brigadier General*." Gen. Towson was brevetted for the capture of the Caledonia, the battle of Chippewa and for the defence of Fort Erie; which is one brevet more than any other officer received during the war. The additional brevet

to which his biographer alludes, he, no doubt, thought was earned in the battle of Niagara; the official report of which says, "Towson's company attached to the first brigade, was the first and last engaged, and, during the whole conflict, maintained that high character which they had previously won by their skill and their valor." The subalterns of this company were each brevetted for gallant conduct in this action, on General Towson's report; and justly did they merit the honor; the only trophy that remains to us of this hard fought field, was won and saved by him; and it was at his suggestion that Colonel McRea urged General Brown to order the decisive charge by which the gallant Miller carried the enemy's Artillery and covered himself with glory. Had General Towson been rewarded for services in this action, as others were, he would at the close of the war, have been "a *Captain* of a *Regiment*, with the brevet rank of a Brigadier General." Why he was not, it is difficult to say; unless it was the intention of the War Department to reward him more effectually by placing him at the head of some new troops then contemplated to be raised; and this, it is understood, was promised to him.

After the battle of Niagara, the American troops retired to Fort Erie, to await reinforcements, and threw up some light works. In stationing the Artillery, Towson was permitted to select his position, and he chose the left flank; that being the most exposed to attack, should the enemy attempt it; of course it was the post of danger and of honor; and was so proved to be on the memorable 15th of August, 1814, as will be seen by the following extracts from the official reports of Major Generals Gaines and Ripley; the latter being the immediate commander of the left flank where Towson was stationed. General Gaines says, "The night was dark, and the early part of it rainy, but the faithful sentinal slept not; one-third of the troops were up at their posts. At half-past two o'clock, the right column of the enemy approached, and though enveloped in darkness, black as his designs and principles, was distinctly heard on our left, and promptly marked by our musketry under Major Wood and cannon under Capt. Towson. Being mounted at the moment, I repaired to the point of attack, where the sheet of fire rolling from Towson's battery, and the musketry of the left wing of the 21st infantry under Major Wood, enabled me to see the enemy's column of about 1500 men approaching on that point; his advance was not checked, until it had approached within ten feet of our infantry. Again Towson's battery emitted a constant sheet of fire:" and again

"Major Hindman and the whole of the Artillery, under the command of that excellent officer, displayed a degree of gallantry and good conduct not to be surpassed. The particular situation of Capt. Towson, and the much lamented Capt. Williams and Lieutenant Mc-

Donough, and that of Lieutenant Watmough, as already described, with their respective commands, rendered them most conspicuous."

General Ripley also says, "On the first fire of the picket, Captain Towson opened his Artillery upon them from Fort Williams, in a style which does him infinite credit. It was continued with very great effect upon the enemy during the whole action;" and again "I cannot refrain from adverting to the manner in which Captain Towson's Artillery was served; I have never seen it equalled. This officer has so often distinguished himself, that to say simply that he is in action, is a volume of eulogium; the army, only to be informed he is there, by a spontaneous assent, are at once satisfied that he has performed well his part. I have no idea that there is an Artillery officer in any service superior to him in the knowledge and performance of his duty."

It will be recollected by all who are familiar with the history of the war, that General Izard was ordered with his division from Plattsburg to relieve the gallant army of Brown, then beseiged at Fort Erie, and that before his arrival the army had relieved itself by a brilliant sortie and the enemy had retired. Finding nothing to employ him at Fort Erie, Izard determined to follow the enemy, and endeavour to bring him to action; he found him awaiting the approach of the American force at Chippewa; and prepared to dispute its passage across the stream. The defences at that place had been strengthened by the construction of redoubts and by extending a breast-work along the margin of the creek on the side of the village for an extent sufficient to cover their infantry and light troops; also by a small work on the opposite side of the creek defended by Artillery. On reconnoitering the enemy's lines, it was discovered that his Artillery was in position, but there being no appearance of any other troops, and certain movements observed in the village, created an impression that he was about to abandon the post—in his letter to the Secretary of War, General Izard says, "Some of my officers were induced to believe they were evacuating the post; and Major General Brown was of this opinion. To ascertain the fact, which seemed to me incredible in the apparant state of their works, I ordered the whole of my little train (consisting of Towson's and Archer's companies, the former three six pounders and one 5½ inch howitzer, the latter two 18 pounders) to advance and fire on their batteries. Nothing could be more gallant than the proceeding of this little band. They advanced through the open ground in full view of the enemy's batteries of twenty-four and twelve pounders, formed the line without any cover whatever, and commenced a cool and correct cannonade, which was immediately answered by their adversaries. The vast superiority of our Artillerists was discernable to the most inexperienced eye. Every shot told. One of their batteries was silenced. The intended effect

was produced, and it was plain that so far from abandoning their forts, the British were in strength, and superior in weight of metal and number of guns. The firing continued till dusk, when I directed our pieces to be withdrawn for the night.

"Two deserters that came over this morning, state that considerable execution was done in the battery which they were posted in, on the hither side of the creek. On our side we lost but four men killed; none wounded except Major S. Lush, army judge advocate."

General Towson was the senior officer of Artillery with Izard's army and commanded both companies. In this contest the enemy had not only more guns and heavier metal than Towson, but a decided advantage in being protected by a breast-work; while his Artillery was exposed on an open plain, without any covering.

To ascertain whether any of the enemy's troops were concealed behind the breast-work on the margin of the creek, Towson determined, after silencing their batteries to reconnoitre that position from the opposite bank, and for that purpose rode rapidly along it within musket range of the embankment; this drew from the concealed troops an irregular fire, the whole extent of the line, somewhat resembling a feu dejoie; and satisfied General Izard that it would be hazarding too much to attempt to cross the Chippawa in the face of such a force.

One of the four Americans killed in this affair, was the orderly sargeant of Towson's company; the son of a gallant soldier of the revolution, and one of the old Maryland line. In youth the former was the playmate and companion of his future Captain; when war was declared, among the first to join his standard was Sergeant Steeds, than whom a braver or a better soldier of his humble sphere never *presented arms*. This, with one exception, was the closing scene of the war on the Niagara frontier; and with that exception, it is believed the first and the last blood shed on that frontier flowed from Towson's company.

After the close of the war, General Towson was assigned to the command of the troops in the harbor of Boston, and in 1816, married the daughter of Caleb Bingham, Esq., of that place. He was afterwards stationed at Newport, R. I., and in 1819 was appointed Paymaster General of the army. This is one of the largest disbursing departments of the government; and for the last twenty years since General Towson has been at the head of it, near forty millions of dollars have been disbursed, all over the union, without loss to the United States.

In 1834, the President recommended that an additional brevet be conferred on such officers as had distinguished themselves in the late war to date ten years after the war brevet, provided they had served faithfully during that time. The Senate concurred in this, which en-

titled General Towson to rank as a brevet Brigadier General from the 15th August, 1824; ten years after "the defence of Fort Erie."

The following are some of the marks of respect that have been paid to the subject of this sketch.

At the close of the war the citizens of Buffalo presented General Towson an elegant sword, with inscriptions expressive of their admiration and gratitude for his services in defence of their frontier. This was the more complimentary, as he was the only officer who received such a mark of approbation; and as those who presented the sword were eye witnesses of the operations of the army on that frontier and of the conduct of its officers. His native State (Maryland) also presented him a sword, on which is inscribed the names of the actions in which he was most conspicious.

The Cincinnati of Maryland elected him an honarary member; and Brown University of Rhode Island conferred on him the honorary degree of A. M.

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